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TAGS: PREL PGOV ASEC ZI
SUBJECT: SADC TALKS CONTINUE; MDC TO PRESENT UNITED FRONT

REF: HARARE 1107

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Glenn Warren. Reason: 1.4 (d)

Summary

11. (C) SADC talks, stalemated over MDC demands for implementation of a new constitution and electoral reforms before elections and for an election date later than March, are continuing. The MDC presented its case last weekend to South African president Thabo Mbeki who promised to talk to Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and confer with SADC colleagues. Meanwhile, the Tsvangirai faction of the MDC has resolved that if it contests the elections, and does not boycott, it will do so as a united front with the MDC Mutambara faction, which in turn has indicated it will be part of such a front.

Breaking the Logjam

12. (C) MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai briefed a HOM meeting December 17 on the status of the SADC talks. He said the talks were stalemated over MDC demands that an agreed-upon constitution be implemented before elections; and that electoral changes, including a reconstituted Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, cleansing of the voters' rolls, and delimitation of constituencies under the new ZEC, take place before elections. The MDC was also demanding an electoral date, probably later than March, that would allow these changes to be implemented and give time for an improved political climate.

13. (C) Tsvangirai said the MDC and ZANU-PF negotiators met with Mbeki last weekend. The MDC emphasized that Mbeki's SADC mandate was to foster a dialogue that would result in free and fair--and uncontested--elections. Mbeki promised

to talk with the principals (presumably Mugabe and Tsvangirai) and then to consult with the SADC Organ of

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Politics and Defense. Tsvangirai thought that Mugabe's SADC colleagues could be a source of pressure. Commenting on Mbeki's internal problems, Tsvangirai said Zimbabwe was not now high on Mbeki's radar. (Note. In his efforts to develop pressure on Mugabe, Tsvangirai travels to Ghana this week to meet with AU president Kufor. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Tsvangirai said talks would continue, as would the MDC's election preparations. At some point the MDC would have to make a determination as to whether conditions would permit a fair election, but Tsvangirai did not say when that point would be reached.

A United Front

¶5. (C) Tsvangirai acknowledged that while over 70 percent of Zimbabweans desire change, there was a sense of apathy due to Mugabe's failure to open up democratic space, and to common perception of MDC disunity and consequent irrelevance. He had recently visited Matabeleland where people said they wanted a united MDC.

¶6. (C) The National Council of the MDC had responded, according to Tsvangirai, by resolving to contest the elections as a united front. The opposition would field one candidate for each local and parliamentary position, and there would be one candidate for president.

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¶7. (C) The united front would make a decision as to whether to participate in or boycott the elections depending on its assessment as to whether the elections would be fair.

Tsvangirai was confident his faction and the Mutambara

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faction would consensually arrive at this decision. (Note. In a call on the Ambassador on December 14, Arthur Mutambara stated a continued willingness to work with Tsvangirai in a united front. End Note.)

A Parenthetical Note on South Africa

¶8. (C) Tsvangirai said that a Jacob Zuma victory in South Africa's ANC contest would result in a change in style, rather than policy. Ultimately, he thought Zimbabwe's opposition would benefit. Venturing into South African politics, Tsvangirai opined that Mbeki had sullied his legacy by competing against Zuma. He should have let Zuma run uncontested, or backed another candidate.

Comment

¶9. (C) The MDC continues to threaten an election boycott if constitutional and electoral changes are not implemented, if there is not a change in the political atmosphere, and if there is not a reasonable electoral date. It hopes that this threat will cause Mbeki and SADC to lean hard enough on Mugabe to produce the desired changes. We expect that Mugabe will not budge on the election date, and that the MDC will decide to contest the elections under less than ideal conditions. Boycotting the elections would make a point, but it would leave ZANU-PF in control, claiming the MDC had boycotted because it knew it did not have the support to win.

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